

Jeremiah 18:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity.

Analysis

God describes His judgment: "I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy." The east wind (qadiym, מַזְרָעַ) was the sirocco—a hot, fierce desert wind that withered vegetation and brought discomfort. Scattering like chaff before wind depicts total dispersal and helplessness (Ps 1:4, Hos 13:3). The Babylonian invasion will scatter Judah's population into exile.

"I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity"—devastating imagery of divine abandonment. To show one's face indicates favor, attention, and blessing (Num 6:25-26, Ps 27:8-9); to turn one's back signals rejection and withdrawal of protection. In their moment of greatest need ("day of their calamity"), God will not intervene to save because they persistently rejected His appeals for repentance.

This represents the ultimate covenant curse—removal of God's protective presence. While Reformed theology affirms God's omnipresence, His special covenantal presence can be withdrawn from unfaithful people and nations. Ichabod—"the glory has departed" (1 Sam 4:21)—describes this tragic loss. Yet even this judgment serves redemptive purposes, preparing a remnant for restoration through the new covenant in Christ.

Historical Context

The east wind regularly devastated Palestinian agriculture, serving as an apt metaphor for destructive judgment (Gen 41:6, 23, 27, Ezek 17:10, 19:12, Hos 13:15). The Babylonian exile scattered Judah's population across Mesopotamia, Egypt, and other regions. God's apparent absence during exile forms the backdrop for post-exilic wrestling with theodicy (Lamentations, Ezekiel) and longing for restoration (Psalms 42-43, 74, 79-80, 137).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to experience God showing His back rather than His face in times of trouble?
2. How does persistent rejection of God's appeals for repentance lead to eventual abandonment to consequences?
3. In what ways did Christ experience God's turned back on the cross, bearing what we deserved?

Interlinear Text

אֹיֵב כְּרוּם פָּנִים אַפִּיצָה קָדִים בָּאֵל
the enemy the east I will scatter and not the face the wind
H341 H6440 H6327 H6921 H7307

אַיִלְמָה בַּיּוֹם אֶרְאָה מִפְנִים עַדְךָ
of their calamity in the day I will shew and not the face them the back
H343 H3117 H7200 H6440 H3808 H6203

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 13:24 (Parallel theme): Therefore will I scatter them as the stubble that passeth away by the wind of the wilderness.

Jeremiah 2:27 (Parallel theme): Saying to a stock, Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned their back unto me, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us.

Psalms 48:7 (Parallel theme): Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind.

Job 27:21 (Parallel theme): The east wind carrieth him away, and he departeth: and as a storm hurleth him out of his place.

Hosea 13:15 (Parallel theme): Though he be fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come, the wind of the LORD shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up: he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels.

Jeremiah 32:33 (Parallel theme): And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction.

Jeremiah 46:21 (Parallel theme): Also her hired men are in the midst of her like fatted bullocks; for they also are turned back, and are fled away together: they did not stand, because the day of their calamity was come upon them, and the time of their visitation.
